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# Modern Philology

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## LA CALPRENÈDE DRAMATIST

It is my purpose in this article, not to stress the importance of a neglected author, but to give the results of an inquiry into the work of one who as a dramatist has hitherto roused the curiosity of several writers, but attracted the study of very few. M. Lanson has discussed some of his plays briefly in his *Esquisse d'une histoire de la tragédie française*.<sup>1</sup> Both he and M. Bernardin have criticized at some length his *Mort de Mithridate*.<sup>2</sup> But most critics have confined themselves to pointing out the novelty of his subjects.<sup>3</sup> I was attracted to La Calprenède not only by the fact that he based the plot of three plays on English history, but by his producing in the important period between the *Cid* and *Polyeucte* more plays than almost any other French author. A man of such well-recognized importance in the history of the novel deserves to be studied, if it is only to determine the quality of his early literary activity, for it was as a dramatist that he served his apprenticeship and acquired what reputation he had before the publication of *Cassandre*. He was hailed at his début by Mairet<sup>4</sup> as of such promise that he could be

<sup>1</sup> Published by the department of Romance Languages and Literature of Columbia University, 1917, Lectures XII and XXI.

<sup>2</sup> In their editions of Racine's *Mithridate*. Cf. for the former pp. 20-22 of his sixth edition (Paris, Hachette, 1909); for the latter pp. 5-11 of his fourth edition (Paris, Delagrave).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. H. Koerting, *Geschichte des französischen Romans im XVII. Jahrhundert* (Leipzig, 1891), p. 245; Abel Lefranc, *R.d.C.C.*, XIV, 582; G. Reynier, *Histoire de la langue et de la littérature française*, edited by Petit de Julleville (Paris, Colin, 1896-99), IV, 388.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. the *épître dédicatoire* to his *Galanteries du duc d'Ossonne*, Paris, Rocolet, 1636, and his *Avertissement au Besançonnois Mairet* (1637), cited by Marty-Laveaux, *Œuvres de P. Corneille*, III, 74, 75.

named among the writers whom he opposed to Corneille. Two of his plays attracted enough interest to be re-written by later dramatists. His *Comte d'Essex* was praised by Thomas Corneille and by Voltaire. Toward the end of his career Molière advanced him 800 francs for a "pièce de Theastre qu'il doit faire"<sup>1</sup> and, even though this may be considered a recognition of his fame as a novelist rather than of his dramatic skill, it is nevertheless a tribute from one who was at the time the chief appraiser of an author's ability to attract an audience.

The sources of information with regard to La Calprenède consist chiefly of his marriage record, the prefaces to his plays, several anecdotes told by Tallemant,<sup>2</sup> and items from Loret's *Muze historique*.<sup>3</sup> These were collected and amplified by Moréri,<sup>4</sup> Nicéron,<sup>5</sup> the frères Parfaict,<sup>6</sup> and others. The conclusions of these biographers appear substantially correct, but I would change the date of La Calprenède's arrival in Paris and would add from his prefaces a little information that has been hitherto overlooked. His full name was Gautier de Costes de la Calprenède. The son of Pierre de Costes and Catherine du Verdier-Genouillac, he was born at the Château of Toulgoud, near Sarlat in the Diocese of Cahors,<sup>7</sup> probably about 1610. He is said by Moréri to have studied at Toulouse. He claims in the preface to his *Mithridate* that all the French he knew before leaving Périgord was what he had read in *Amadis de Gaule*. The sources of his plays indicate that he may have read not only Latin, but Italian and English. He was a cadet, possibly an officer, in the Guards and saw service in Germany, where he suffered from the famine.<sup>8</sup> Before leaving the army, he composed his first play,

<sup>1</sup> La Grange, *Registre*, p. 52, under March 12, 1663.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter CCCLXXII, Vol. VI, in the edition of Monmerqué and Paris (Paris, Techener, 1857).

<sup>3</sup> For July 12, 1659; March 31 and October 20, 1663.

<sup>4</sup> *Le grand Dictionnaire historique*, especially in the edition of 1732 (Paris, Coignard) under the title *Costes*.

<sup>5</sup> *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire des hommes illustres* (Paris, Biasson), XXXVII, 235-43. This volume appeared in 1737.

<sup>6</sup> *Histoire du Théâtre françois* (Paris, Le Mercier et Saillant), especially V, 148 sq. This volume appeared in 1745.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Jal, *Dictionnaire*, p. 307, and Moréri, *loc. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> Preface to his *Comte d'Essex*.

probably toward 1635.<sup>1</sup> If we accept this date, we must reject that of 1632, given by Moréri without proof, for his coming to Paris, as he tells us that he wrote the play a fortnight after leaving his province.<sup>2</sup> Tallemant<sup>3</sup> says that he was long “un des arcs-boutants du bureau d’adresse.” La Calprenède asserts<sup>4</sup> that he was protected by the princesse de Guimené. He ultimately established himself at court, where the queen, complaining one day of her ladies in waiting, found that they were so absorbed by the story-telling of a certain young Gascon that they had no time for their work. She thereupon sent for La Calprenède and enjoyed at first hand his skill as a raconteur.<sup>5</sup> He is said to have become a “gentilhomme ordinaire de la chambre du roi.”<sup>6</sup> His marriage in 1648 to a widow of considerable notoriety<sup>7</sup> and the circumstances of the latter portion of his life hardly concern us, as his last published play was written no later than 1642 and his literary efforts were subsequently devoted chiefly to the composition of his three lengthy novels.<sup>8</sup>

What is important for us is that “il n’y a jamais eu un homme plus gascon que cetuy-cy,”<sup>9</sup>—for it is he and not Cyrano de Bergerac who was the real representative of Périgord in seventeenth-century dramatic literature—that he was of noble birth, soldier and courtier as well as writer. Tallemant also relates that when La Calprenède was standing behind the scenes at the first representation of *Mithridate*, a friend called to him that his play was making a hit. “‘Chut, chut’ luy dit-il, ‘ne me nommez point; car si le pere le sçavoit! Une fois,’ disoit-il, ‘que le pere, qui ne vouloit pas que je fisse de vers, me trouve comme je rimois, il se mit en colere, prit un pot de chambre, d’argent s’entend, pour me le jetter à la teste.’” The force of this anecdote is strengthened by the evidence of his prefaces, where

<sup>1</sup> Mairet, writing in January, 1636, *op. cit.*, speaks of this as a recent work. Grenailles (cf. below, *loc. cit.*) considers him to have been among the last of the new generation of dramatists. The play does not appear in Mahelot’s *Mémoire*. Its privilege was not obtained till 1636.

<sup>2</sup> Preface to his *Mort de Mithridate*.

<sup>3</sup> *Loc. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Preface to his *Comte d’Essex*. <sup>5</sup> Cf. Nicéron, *loc. cit.* <sup>6</sup> Cf. Moréri, *loc. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Tallemant, *loc. cit.* Gossip made him out to be her sixth husband, but the marriage contract shows that he was the third.

<sup>8</sup> *Cassandre*, 10 vols. (1642–1645); *Cléopâtre*, 12 vols. (1647); *Faramond*, 7 vols. (*privilege*, 1658; left unfinished at La Calprenède’s death).

<sup>9</sup> Tallemant, *loc. cit.*

La Calprenède assumes a disdain for the writer's profession that is remarkable in so voluminous an author. He is ashamed to be known as a poet. Writing is an "amusement que l'erreur du siècle rend presque honteux à ceux de ma profession."<sup>1</sup> If a nobleman excels in an art, they say, "c'est un ioïeur de Luth, c'est un musicien, c'est un Poëte." *Ieanne d'Angleterre* is a "mauvaise piece"; *Edouard*, "un ouvrage si mauvais et le dernier de cette nature que je pretends mettre au jour." He protests that he would not put his name even to *Essex*, his masterpiece, if it had not already appeared on worse plays, published in his absence and without his knowledge.

That he actually believed his work to be worthless seems improbable. He admits that his *Ieanne* was "cherement aimee." But he would be classified with soldiers and courtiers rather than with artists. His attitude is that satirized more than once by Molière. All that a noble wrote must have "l'air cavalier," and smell of no pedantry; he must compose without effort and without delay. La Calprenède's carelessness in matters of publication may be due to the same cause. His first play was printed largely in his absence, so that he had time to correct the proofs of the last act only. The documents authorizing the printing of this play and of the two that followed it were granted to the publisher, not to La Calprenède. He had so little to do with the publication of *Ieanne d'Angleterre* that his publisher thought him dead and referred to "feu M. de la Calprenède." He dedicated only three of his ten pieces and left one of them unpublished.

His plays may be listed as follows:

1. *La Mort de Mithridate*, tragédie (Paris, Sommaville, 1637); dedicated to the queen; *privilège*, Sept. 30; *achevé*, Nov. 16, 1636; first played probably in 1635.
2. *La Bradamante* (?), tragi-comédie (Paris, Sommaville, 1637); *privilège*, Feb. 7; *achevé*, Feb. 20.
3. *Le Clarionte ou le Sacrifice sanglant*, tragi-comédie (Paris, Sommaville, 1637); *privilège*, Feb. 7; *achevé*, Aug. 3.
4. *Ieanne Reyne d'Angleterre*, tragédie (Paris, Sommaville, 1638); dedicated by the publisher to the abbé d'Armentière.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the prefaces to *la Mort de Mithridate*, *le Comte d'Essex*, and *Edouard*.

5. *Le Comte d'Essex*, tragédie (Paris, 1639); *achevé*, May 30, dedicated to the princesse de Guimené; Lyon, Claude de la Rivière, 1654.<sup>1</sup>
6. *Edouard*, tragi-comédie (Paris, Courbé, 1640); *privilege*, Feb. 23, 1639; *achevé*, May 10, 1640; dedicated to the duc d'Angoulesme.
7. *La Mort des enfans d'Herodes ou suite de Mariane*, tragédie (Paris, Courbé, 1639); *privilege*, May 15; *achevé*, July 2; dedicated to Richelieu.
8. *Phalante*, tragédie (Paris, Sommaville, 1642); *privilege*, May 3, 1641; *achevé*, Nov. 12, 1641.
9. *Hermenigilde*, tragédie (Paris, Sommaville et Courbé, 1643); *privilege*, Feb. 6; *achevé*, Sept. 10.
10. *Bellissaire*, played at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, July, 1659;<sup>2</sup> not printed.
11. Play to be written for Molière.<sup>3</sup>

## I. EARLY PLAYS

*La Mort de Mithridate*, following closely Mairêt's *Sophonisbe*, interests us as one of the earliest tragedies composed by writers of Corneille's generation. It introduced its author to the dramatic world and gave rise to at least three anecdotes that evidence a certain notoriety.<sup>4</sup> Mairêt<sup>5</sup> says of this play and Benserade's *Cléopâtre* that the "apprentissage est un demi-chef-d'œuvre qui donne de merveilleuses espérances des belles choses qu'ils pourront faire à l'avenir,"

<sup>1</sup> These are the only editions to which I have had access. The *Bibliothèque dramatique de Monsieur de Soleinne*, I, 255, declares that the play was reprinted at least five times. A copy of the Lyons edition owned by the New York Public Library is the only copy of any of the plays I have been able to find in America.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Loret, *Muze historique* of July 12, 1659, and the frères Parfaict, *op. cit.*, VIII, 277-78.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. La Grange, *loc. cit.* The *Bibliothèque dramatique de Soleinne*, V, *supplément*, 25, attributes to him *la Lizimène* of G. de Coste, Paris, Thomas de la Ruelle, 1632, but as La Calprenède's name appears nowhere else in this form and as he tells us that *Mithridate* was his first play, this attribution seems incorrect. There was, moreover, a dramatic author named de Coste to whom Gaillard refers in his *Cartel, Œuvres Meslées*, 1634, pp. 33, 34.

<sup>4</sup> I have already cited one. Another, also from Tallemant, *loc. cit.*, tells us that "un jour qu'il avoit un habit d'une couleur bizarre, comme tout le monde estoit en peine de sçavoir quelle couleur c'estoit: 'C'est,' dit le feu Marquis de Gesvres, 'couleur de *Mithridate*.'" The same story in an apparently garbled form is told by Moréri, *op. cit.*, II, 450, with the substitution for *Mithridate* of *Silvandre*, a work otherwise unknown. It is also related that when the actor who played Mithridates at Epiphany swallowed the poison, saying "Mais c'est trop differer," a spectator in the parterre completed the verse with the words "le Roy boit, le Roy boit"; cf. the frères Parfaict, *op. cit.*, V, 160.

<sup>5</sup> *Loc. cit.*

and declares, the following year, that *Mithridate* has been played as often as any of Corneille's pieces. Grenailles insists that it "passe pour un chef-d'œuvre au jugement des habiles."<sup>1</sup>

The principal source is Appian. Plutarch and Florus are used to a smaller extent.<sup>2</sup> The subject is the death of Mithridates, as a result of his wars with the Romans and the desertion of his son, Pharnaces. According to Appian, the latter won over first the Roman deserters, then other soldiers in his father's army by representing to them the danger of invading Italy, as Mithridates was preparing to do. He was crowned king while his father "saw these things from a high portico." Unable to escape, Mithridates gave poison to his two daughters, who died at once, and took some himself, but, "although he walked about rapidly to hasten its action, it had no effect, because he had accustomed himself to other drugs by continually trying them as a means of protection against poisoners."<sup>3</sup> He accordingly persuaded Bituitus, an officer of the Gauls, to kill him.

La Calprenède lays the scene at Sinope, giving as a reason that it was one of the best towns of Mithridates' kingdom. Racine's location of it in the Crimea is more nearly in accordance with history. La Calprenède probably thought of Sinope because it was the town to which Pompey returned the body of Mithridates after he had received it from Pharnaces. When the play begins, the Romans, contrary to history, are besieging their enemy. The scene passes from the Roman camp to the palace of Mithridates, to the top of the wall between. Such use of a wall occurs in several plays of the period<sup>4</sup> and is condemned by d'Aubignac<sup>5</sup> on the ground that the wall must have been stormed during the progress of the play, yet the spectators, to whom it has been visible all the while, have seen no such event take place. Finally, a room in the palace is represented, cut off by a piece of tapestry that is drawn aside at the proper moment, according to a method noted in Mahelot's *Mémoire*.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the preface to his *Innocent Malheureux*, cited by Bernardin, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Appian, *Roman History*, Book XII, chaps. xv and xvi; Plutarch, *Pompey and Lucullus*; Florus, Book I, chap. xl. It is improbable that La Calprenède knew either Behourt's *Hysicratée* (1604) or Margarit Pageau's *Monime* (1600).

<sup>3</sup> Appian's *Roman History*, translated by Horace White (New York, Macmillan, 1912), IV, 453, 454.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Auvray, *Dorinde*; Scudéry, *L'Amour tyrannique*; Puget de La Serre, *le Sac de Carthage*.

<sup>5</sup> *Pratique du Théâtre* (edition of Amsterdam, Bernard, 1715), I, 92 and 219.

The first act introduces the two groups of persons whose conflict forms the struggle of the play. On one side are the Romans and their new ally. Pompey is present only long enough to discuss the ethics of Pharnaces' treachery and to hand over to him with surprising trustfulness the command of the Roman army. Within the town we see the other group, Mithridates and the women of his household. The second act is concerned chiefly with a last sortie of the besieged and a description of the mental state of Pharnaces, torn between the self-interest that has led him to the Roman camp and the love he feels for his wife, strengthened by a certain remorse at deserting his father.

It is with the third act that a more completely classical author would have begun his play. The sortie has failed. The citizens of Sinope surrender. Preparations are made to carry the palace by assault. The only hope for the king is to win over his son. Bérénice, wife of Pharnaces, who has remained faithful to her father-in-law, urges her husband from the top of the wall to abandon the Romans. After she fails, Mithridates, then his daughters and his wife try to persuade him, but in vain. The Coriolanus situation does not end in the triumph of patriotism or filial devotion. There is nothing left for the old king but to die and this he does magnificently in the last act, for which the rest of the play has been but a preparation. He and the four women of his family take poison in turn, but Mithridates continues to live while the others die one by one, for his system is so filled with antidotes that the draught has no effect upon him. This harrowing situation is made still more intense by the news that the Romans have broken into the palace. Mithridates now stabs himself, leaving the order that his pale corpse be placed upon the throne. Accordingly, when his son enters and the tapestry is drawn aside, he sees the bodies of Mithridates and Hypsicratée on the two thrones, those of his sisters and his wife at the king's feet. The effect of this spectacle is further heightened by the remorse of Pharnaces and the cynical calmness of his Roman companion.

M. Bernardin says of this tragedy: "Elle méritait d'être mieux écrite; car elle renferme une fort belle scène entre le père et le fils, le rôle de Bérénice est une création remarquable, le dénouement porte à son comble l'horreur tragique."<sup>1</sup> He goes on to point out

<sup>1</sup> *Loc. cit.*



the superiority of Racine's *Mithridate*, in which the true character of the king is preserved, though the details of history are not. I do not think, however, that La Calprenède should be taxed with too great fidelity to the records. He admits that he has altered his sources by laying the scene at Sinope, introducing Pompey, creating Bérénice, causing the king's wife to be present at his death, making of that death a suicide,<sup>1</sup> followed by the remorse of Pharnaces. Such changes as these are to the play's advantage and show already a freedom of attitude toward history that is characteristic, not only of his other plays, but of his historical novels. It is true, however, as Bernardin points out, that he fails to grasp the full dramatic value of Mithridates' character, for he gives only his noble side, his courage and patriotic hatred of the Romans, while his cruelty, his craftiness, which Racine depicts, are omitted, as well as his interest in music and Greek literature. As in Racine and in history, he is still a lover and a fighter, despite his advanced age, but La Calprenède fails to show by action the vigor of his character. The *sortie* is carried out behind the scenes. The interview with his son is inspired by the women. Only at the end do we see him acting with determination and there the effect is spoiled by the lack of forcible phraseology.

Mithridates is not represented as a tragic hero, who dies through his own error, but as a victim of his son's treachery and the strength of Rome. The dramatic struggle takes place in the breast of this son, who becomes the essential, if not the most emphasized, figure in the play. At the risk of improbability, La Calprenède gives him command of the Roman army in order that he may have the power to decide for or against his father. Love and remorse weigh upon him, but neither his wife's entreaties, his father's curse, nor the threats of his stepmother can win him over. The character is treated too unsympathetically to appear thoroughly dramatic. He is a villain rather than a man who, after weighing both sides, has come sincerely to the opinion that union with Rome is for the best interests of Asia Minor. The presentation of the problem is, moreover, anti-climatic, for his first interview is with his wife, who has most influence

<sup>1</sup> He gives as his reason for not having him slain, as in Appian, by the Gaul, the fact that such an ending had already been seen in two *Cléopâtres*. He refers, of course, to the plays of Benserade and Mairêt, which had recently appeared. In both of these Anthony kills himself, but with the aid of an attendant.

upon him, the second with his father, the third with his sisters and step-mother. Here, as in the character itself, La Calprenède shows a certain power of dramatic conception, but with it a carelessness in detail that makes his work ineffective.

La Calprenède prides himself on the introduction of Bérénice and attributes the success of his play largely to the manner in which this rôle was interpreted by a great actress in the best troops of Europe. She makes indeed a pathetic and noble figure. So deeply does she feel her husband's treachery that she joins her fate to that of his father's family rather than profit by his betrayal of them. She pleads vainly:

Si du bonheur passé le souvenir t'est doux,  
 Élève un peu tes yeux, vois ta femme à genoux.  
 Considère les pleurs qui coulent sur sa face,  
 Et pour quels ennemis elle attend une grâce:  
 Je parle pour tes sœurs, pour ton père et pour moi,  
 Et bien plus que pour nous je demande pour toi.<sup>1</sup>

Bernardin points out the resemblance between this rôle and that of Sabine, for not only are the situations of the two women somewhat similar, but both are willing to suffer vicariously. It is by no means improbable that Corneille found here the suggestion for this character.

The other persons are of small importance. The two daughters are undifferentiated. The one member of Mithridates' harem brought upon the stage is Hypsicratée, a sort of Amazon who, according to Plutarch, accompanied the king in all his battles, dressed as a man. Although historically justified, the character possesses little human interest. The Romans are depicted according to tradition as stern and cynical men of affairs, strong and grasping, unaffected by sympathy or sentiment.

In spite of such errors as I have indicated, the play had much to recommend it to its audiences, the struggle in the soul of Pharnaces, the situation of Mithridates, the character of Bérénice, her interview with her husband, the meeting of father and son, finally the fifth act with its climax of tragic horror, equaled by few plays of the period. One cannot be overcritical of the "coup d'essai d'un jeune soldat," who knew of French only what he had read in *Amadis* and who could

<sup>1</sup> Cited by Bernardin, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

correct the printer's errors only for the fifth act. That the play remained on the boards for some thirty years is shown by its being listed in Poisson's *Baron de la Crasse* (1662) among the plays then popular in the provinces. It is important in the history of classical tragedy, as it may have suggested to Racine the subject of his *Mithridate*, to Corneille the character of Sabine, and as it is one of the first plays of its author's generation to depict the struggles of the Near East between the time of Alexander and the Roman conquest, a field that was to prove rich both for French tragedy and French romance.

*Bradamante* is attributed to La Calprenède by the frères Parfaict and the *Bibliothèque du théâtre françois*. De Beauchamps says that this tragi-comedy, "suivant M. de C., est douteuse entre lui et le duc de Saint-Aignan." No author's name appears in the printed play. The privilege was obtained by De Sommaville the same day that he received permission to print La Calprenède's *Clarionte*. The combat of an Amazon-like heroine would attract La Calprenède, but also a number of his rivals. There is no certainty that he wrote the play, but such evidence as we have points to him rather than to anyone else. If it is his work, it is his least original production.

The subject is the familiar story from the *Orlando furioso*, cantos XLIV-XLVI, which Garnier had dramatized over half a century before. Did the author base his play solely on Ariosto, did he follow Garnier alone, or did he make use of both? It would be difficult to prove that he did not turn directly to the *Orlando*. If confirmation of this statement is needed, it may be found in the scene depicting Léon's discovery of Roger and the latter's confession of his trip to the East, where La Calprenède follows details of the *Orlando* which Garnier omits.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, he may have had suggestions from Garnier, whose play was frequently reprinted down to 1619. Evidence of such influence is not very strong, as both plays vary little from Ariosto's narrative, but the younger dramatist may easily have derived from his predecessor the idea of dramatizing the story and such details as the fact that in the duel between the lovers Roger presses Bradamante in the plays, though he only parries her

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Orlando furioso*, XLVI, 26, ff.; *la Bradamante* (Garnier), V, 1; *la Bradamante* (La Calprenède), IV, 1-3.

blows in the *Orlando*; the planning of Marphise's stratagem in advance; the omission of Melisse's agency in the discovery of Roger;<sup>1</sup> the introduction of the comic element, especially in the rôle of Aymon.

Whether La Calprenède used Garnier or not, it is interesting to note by a comparison of the two plays the progress made in dramatic art during the half century that separates them. Garnier had omitted the chorus, but he had clung to the introductory monologue, the unequal distribution of matter among the acts, the excessive use of monologue and stereotyped dialogue, the lack of preparation for dramatic scenes that characterize imitators of Seneca. La Calprenède begins his play with the dialogue between Roger and Léon in which the former agrees to fight the latter's duel with Bradamante. He enters at once into the heart of his subject by omitting almost all the material which makes up Garnier's first two acts. Monologues, though retained, are not given to characters in whom we take little interest. The rôle of Beatrice is omitted and with it the farcical scene of the second act, which, depicting a domestic quarrel, must have seemed to La Calprenède out of place, even in a tragi-comedy. Dramatic preparation for the duel is more carefully made. The idea of bringing Léon and Bradamante together before the duel is original with La Calprenède. A still more decided change lies in the fact that this duel takes place on the stage, in the presence of Charlemagne and his court.<sup>2</sup> Garnier, on the other hand, does not show Bradamante in the presence of either lover before the last scene of the play.

The influence of the pastoral is seen in the description of the forest to which Roger retires after the battle, where he visits the "creux de ce rocher" and carves on a tree the statement that he has committed suicide. Interest is added to the last act by the addition of a scene in which the court awaits the return of Roger and by a comic ending that is not found in either of his predecessors. In his criticism

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Orlando furioso*, XLV, 76, 103; XLVI, 20, ff.; *la Bradamante* (Garnier), IV, 1, 4; V, 1; (La Calprenède), II, 7; III, 1-2; IV, 1-3,

<sup>2</sup> One might think that, if Richelieu objected to the *Cid* on account of the duel, although it is neither acted on the stage nor approved by the king, much more would he have disapproved of this play, and that the fact that it was published anonymously might be due to this cause. I am not inclined, however, to press this point, in view of the frequency of duels in French plays of the period.

of Garnier's play *Faguet*<sup>1</sup> points out that the Bulgarian ambassadors constitute a *deus ex machinâ*. La Calprenède introduces them only once, after the king has acknowledged Roger to be the victor, an improvement over Garnier's method, but like the latter he uses their offer of a throne as a means of winning Aymon's consent to the marriage of his daughter and thus lays himself open to a similar criticism.

How far this tragi-comedy still falls short of the purely classical French play may be seen by comparing it with Thomas Corneille's *Bradamante*,<sup>2</sup> written a half century later. There the unities of time and place are preserved. Roger and Bradamante are brought together frequently before the end of the play. The spectacular duel takes place behind the scenes. The comic passages disappear. Superfluous figures, Renaud and Naymes, are omitted. Aymon and the Bulgarians, though figuring in the plot, are not seen on the stage. Even the rôle of *deus ex machinâ* is somewhat softened by having the arrival of the Bulgarians announced at the end of the fourth act. There is no evidence of influence exerted by either Garnier or La Calprenède on Thomas Corneille, who asserts that he draws his plot from Ariosto.<sup>3</sup>

A tragi-comedy called *le Clarionte ou le Sacrifice sanglant* was published the same year. Clarionte, a Corsican prince, and his fiancée, Rosimène, daughter of the king of Sardinia, are shipwrecked on the Island of Majorca, where the young man is condemned by reason of his beauty to be sacrificed to the sun. Rosimène and the daughter of the hostile king of Majorca offer to die in his place, while he insists they shall not, thus fulfilling the oracle's demand that the sacrifice continue till three fair victims contend for an honor whose prize is death. But the king will not release Clarionte until he is conquered by the latter's brother, who with his sister and an army arrive in time to save the hero both from the sacrificial block and the pursuit of the king's daughter, and to end the play in a triple marriage.

<sup>1</sup> *La tragédie française au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Paris and Leipzig, Welter, 1897), pp. 218-19.

<sup>2</sup> Published in 1696. The author implies in his preface that he wrote it fifteen years before.

<sup>3</sup> M. Marsan in his critical edition of Mairet's *Sylvie*, Paris, *Société nouvelle de librairie et d'édition*, 1905, p. 231, notes that a line from La Calprenède's play, III, 4,

Amolliroient sans doute un cœur de diamant,

is an imitation of line 2048 in *Sylvie*,  
Amolliroient-ils pas des cœurs de diamant.

The source of this tragi-comedy is unknown. The characters and incidents are those of many heroic or pastoral romances. The shipwreck, the sacrifice to the sun, the oracle are familiar to readers of Heliodorus. The woodland scenes, the carving on trees, the princess who hides in a forest, the *deus ex machinâ*, and the triple marriage are not uncommon in pastoral plays. The contest in generosity which gives the play its most distinctive feature has its parallel in various works of the period.<sup>1</sup> The most modern element in the play is the fact that the country has been ravaged by religious wars. The structure, as in *Bradamante*, is looser than that of La Calprenède's tragedies. There is nothing in the characters to distinguish them from the usual noble and beautiful heroes and heroines of tragi-comedy.

## II. ENGLISH PLAYS

La Calprenède now returned to the field of his first success, historical tragedy, but sought in English history the source of his plots. The fact that he was attracted to the Tudors suggests that he aimed in his *Ieanne d'Angleterre* to re-write the *Ecossaise* of Montchrestien in much the same way as he may have re-written Garnier's *Bradamante*. In the *Ecossaise* he found not only a subject from recent English history, but the story of a Tudor queen who reluctantly condemns to death a captive princess on the charge of conspiring against her. In both this play and his *Ieanne d'Angleterre* the queen feels sympathy for her captive cousin; the council of nobles insists on the execution, the decision is reached between the acts, the condemned princess not only displays courage, but refers to her death as a happy event.<sup>2</sup> Instead, however, of merely adapting the older tragedy to the dramatic technique of his day, he selected a different event, the execution of Lady Jane Grey. The historical account was apparently known to him through Italian rather than English or

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hardy, *Gesippe*, *Théâtre*, IV (Rouen, David Du Petit Val), 1626; Chevreau, *Les deux Amis* (Paris, Courbè, 1638); Du Ryer, *Clarigène*, Paris, Sommaville, 1639; Reynier, *Le Roman sentimental avant l'Astrée* (Paris, Colin, 1908), pp. 78, 85. A somewhat similar contest between lovers, one of whom is to be sacrificed in order to avert calamity from a country, is found subsequently in Scudéry's epic, *Alaric* (edition of Paris, Loyson, 1673), pp. 54-63.

<sup>2</sup> Minor resemblances occur. The phrase "à gros bouillons" is used by both writers in describing the execution; "fay tomber le chef bas et voler l'âme aux cieux" becomes "le corps tombe sanglant et son âme s'envole"; in both cases the severed head bounces after striking the ground. Cf. *Les tragédies de Montchrestien*, edited by Petit de Julleville (Paris, Plon, 1891), pp. 108-10.

French sources.<sup>1</sup> He followed them particularly in the meeting of Mary and Norfolk at the Tower, the trial of Northumberland, and the execution of Jane and her husband. He omits certain important elements, especially the religious question and Wyatt's uprising. To have treated the first would have lost for his heroine the sympathy of his Catholic audience, while it would have been difficult to introduce Wyatt without destroying the unity of his play.

The tragedy begins just before the arrest of Lady Jane. With her husband and her father-in-law she is shut up in London much as Mithridates and his family had been besieged in Sinope. At the end of the first act, however, the two plots separate, for, while Mithridates held out to the end, Lady Jane and her relatives surrender and are placed in the Tower. The second act gives two *scènes à faire*, Mary's deliberation as to what shall be done with her prisoners and Lady Jane's interview with her in which she defends her *coup d'état* on the ground that Edward VI had left her the crown. In the third act La Calprenède gives the first example of his favorite dramatic device, the formal trial. Northumberland is arraigned before a jury of his peers, presided over by Norfolk, recently released from the Tower. The conditions of the trial are announced by the chancellor. The court rules, after Northumberland has made the plea, that he had acted in accordance with a statute of Henry VIII and that he should not be tried by men as guilty as he. Two of the lords reply to his accusation against them. His fate is left in Mary's hands.

After further consultation, the queen compromises between the general condemnation urged by Elizabeth and the pardon to which her sympathy for Lady Jane makes her incline, by condemning Northumberland and Guilford, setting free the former's daughters, and referring Lady Jane's case to the lords. As one trial has already been shown, Lady Jane's takes place behind the scenes. We learn in the fifth act that it has resulted in her condemnation. On taking leave of the warden, she gives him a "diamant," evidently considered

<sup>1</sup> He is certainly nearer to the account given by Pollini in his *Historia ecclesiastica* (Rome, 1594), pp. 250 ff. and 264 ff., and to Rosso, *Historia d'Inghilterra* (Ferrara, 1591), folio 6—folio 58, than he is to Holinshed, Grafton, Foxe, or De Thou. For example, the name d'Erby, given by the Italians to the warden, is used by La Calprenède, while in the English versions he is called Bridges or Bruges. Cf. Holinshed, *Chronicles* (London, 1808), IV, 23; Grafton, *Chronicle* (London, 1809), II, 543; Foxe, *Acts and Monuments* (London, Pratt) (4th edition), VI, 424; de Thou, *Histoire universelle* (London, 1734) II, 414, 428–30. I have been unable to consult Michelangelo Florio, *Historia de la vita e de la morte de l'Illustrissima Signora Giovanna Graia*, 1607.

a more princely gift than the book with which she actually presented him. The play ends with a description of the heroine's death and the expression of the queen's remorse.

While a certain interest attaches to the men, the English lords engaged in trying the leader with whom they had recently conspired, the pathetic Guilford, the more forceful Northumberland, beaten, but still fighting desperately with his wits, one is chiefly attracted by the three princesses. Jane is the victim, first of her father-in-law, who forced her to accept the crown, then of her judges. She feels, even before her arrest, that she is doomed, though she warns Gloucester that her power may return and argues with Mary in her own defense. There is reference to her "bel esprit," but little use is made of her dialectic ability. The necessary love interest is supplied by scenes that show her devotion to Guilford. Whatever qualms she may have felt at usurping the throne are not translated into action, for the play does not begin soon enough for us to see her at the moment of her choice. If La Calprenède could have introduced the religious motive, he would have better explained why she conspired and kept the character dramatic to the end, as Corneille did in the case of Polyeucte. He would also have strengthened his treatment of Mary and rendered her action toward Jane less hard to understand. As it is, Jane cannot struggle, while Mary's character lacks motivation. Her sister Elizabeth is the most Cornelian of the three. She is represented here from the Catholic point of view as a cruel and vengeful woman, unmoved by the fate of her enemies.

It is regrettable that this interesting subject, full of dramatic possibilities and appearing at a time when its example might have been widely followed, was handled by a writer who did not have the necessary stylistic and dramatic talent to make the most of it. The originality shown in the choice of subject, the sympathetic appreciation of both Mary and Jane, and the rendering of certain scenes are highly commendable, but the interest is scattered over persons whose actions are not sufficiently interdependent and the main action does not come near enough to filling the play. Jane's trial, if properly developed, might have supplied the lacking struggle, but it takes place behind the scenes. The third act is concerned entirely with Northumberland, while the fourth merely repeats the second. These



shortcomings may account for the play's lack of success, but credit must be given it for opening a new field and preparing the way for its author's *chef d'œuvre*.

This was the *Comte d'Essex*, a play that attracts our attention at once by the peculiar interest of its plot. The love of Queen Elizabeth for the Earl of Essex and her refusal to pardon him when condemned for treason formed, even without the romantic amplifications that were subsequently supplied, a dramatic theme that quickly found its way into various fields of literature.<sup>1</sup> Interest in the subject may have been enhanced for a French audience by the recollection that Essex had led the expeditionary force sent to aid Henri IV against the League. His execution had taken place in 1601, less than thirty-eight years before La Calprenède dramatized the event. The *Comte d'Essex* is the first place,<sup>2</sup> as far as I can ascertain, where the story appears that Elizabeth gave Essex a ring with the promise that any crime he might commit would be pardoned when he returned it, that, after his condemnation, he sent her the ring with a plea for mercy, but that the woman to whom it was intrusted did not deliver it till after the earl's execution. This legend, which received wide currency and has been accepted by some writers, even in recent years, as historical, occurs in several versions, inasmuch as the woman's failure to deliver the ring has been explained in various ways. As no one has attempted to describe how the story arose and how these versions are related to one another, I would offer a few suggestions in regard to them, which will show the importance of La Calprenède in the history of the tale.

The grounds for believing that the story is not historical are that none of the evidence for it is contemporary, that none of the several well-authenticated accounts of Elizabeth's death make mention of the incident, and that Essex said nothing about it at the time of his execution.<sup>3</sup> Yet La Calprenède's testimony shows that the story had already been formed some time before he wrote, apparently in

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Richard Schiedermaier, *Der Graf von Essex in der Literatur* (Kaiserslautern, 1908).

<sup>2</sup> The *D.N.B.* cites nothing earlier than the middle of the seventeenth century. Ranke, *Englische Geschichte* (Leipzig, 1870), pp. 344-45, declares that it first appears in Aubéry's *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de Hollande* (1680). A Spanish play, *El Conde del Sez*, printed just before La Calprenède's, has an utterly different plot with no reference to the story of the ring.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. *Edinburgh Review*, 1853, XCVIII, 161-65, and *D.N.B.*, XLV, 437, 438. The argument is weakened, but not materially, by La Calprenède's evidence.

English oral tradition. "Si vous trouvez quelque chose dans ceste Tragedie," he writes in his preface, "que vous n'ayez point leu dans les Historiens Anglois, croyez que ie ne l'ay point inuenté, et que ie n'ay rien escrit que sur de bonnes [*sic*] memoires que i'en auois receues de personnes de condition et qui ont peut-estre part à l'Histoire." The legend must have grown up partly out of an effort to reconcile the historical facts of the queen's affection for Essex and her signing his death warrant, partly out of some account of a ring given by a sovereign to a favorite in order to circumvent the law to his advantage. The first attempt at explanation is a statement, said to have been made by Elizabeth to the duc de Biron,<sup>1</sup> that, had it not been for the earl's pride, she would have pardoned him. But this was not satisfactory, for accounts of his death show Essex to have been almost unduly penitent on the scaffold. An undelivered message would easily explain this seeming contradiction. The use of a token under such circumstances was common enough practice. That this token should take the form of a ring previously given with a promise by the queen may have been determined by the fact that Henry VIII once gave a ring to Cranmer to enable him to appeal from his council to himself.<sup>2</sup> I can find no other story of a ring that would so readily have played a part in forming the Essex tradition.

In the earliest form of the story the only motive attributed to the person who prevented the delivery of the ring was probably personal enmity, for this is the only cause given in the version attributed to Sir Dudley Carleton,<sup>3</sup> but jealousy could easily be added, as is the case in La Calprenède's play. The difficulty of explaining how a woman who was in love with Essex could fail to deliver the ring probably suggested the addition of the third woman, found in the *History of the most renowned Queen Elizabeth and her great Favorite*,<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Histoires memorables*, 1607.

<sup>2</sup> The story is told by Cranmer's secretary Ralph Morice, whose manuscript was not published till it appeared in the *Narratives of the Days of the Reformation*, edited by J. G. Nichols, Camden Society, 1859, pp. 455-59, but it was used by Foxe and formed the basis of Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, V, 1-3. By this means Cranmer escaped punishment, an event which shows that the extraordinary thing about the story of Elizabeth's ring is not that she gave it to Essex, but that he failed to put it to use.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Bayle, *Dictionnaire*, p. 1063 in the edition of Amsterdam (Bohm, 1720). The account is taken from Aubéry du Maurier, who declared that the story was told Prince Maurice by Sir Dudley Carleton, English ambassador to Holland. Essex is supposed to have given the ring to a relative, wife of Admiral Howard, who forced her to keep it till after the execution.

<sup>4</sup> This account appeared toward the middle of the century according to the *D.N.B.*, *loc. cit.*, and was followed by Francis Osborn in his *Traditionall Memories of Elizabeth*

according to which the queen, the Countess of Nottingham, and the Countess of Rutland were rivals for Essex's love.

La Calprenède formed his tragedy largely out of this legend, sprung, perhaps, from the union in the popular mind of a real event in the reign of Henry VIII and court gossip concerning the queen's love of the earl. To this he added details from Bacon's account<sup>1</sup> of the trial and execution of Essex, combining the original accusation of intelligence with the Irish leader, Tyrone, and the charges based on his subsequent attempt to seize the queen's person. He may not only have added the love of Lady Cecil and Essex for each other, but have identified Lady Cecil with the woman who prevented the ring from reaching the queen, for in other accounts other names are given her.

The play begins with an interview between Elizabeth and Essex, in which she charges him with treachery and urges him to confess, but he remains defiant and is soon arrested with his friend, Southampton. Already the psychological interest is introduced by a monologue in which Elizabeth wavers between her love for Essex and her duty to the country. The ring motive is prepared by the hero's dark hint that he has "des gages" which will prevent his disgrace. As subsequently in *Cinna*, the second act begins with a conference between the ruler and two advisers. Cecil urges severity, while Salisbury recommends justice. Before making her decision, Elizabeth seeks to induce Essex to humble himself and send her the ring. For this purpose she dispatches Lady Cecil to have an interview with him in prison. We now learn that Lady Cecil has been his mistress and that he has deserted her. When Essex sees her, his love returns, but he refuses to ask pardon for offenses against the queen that he denies having committed. The trial scene, already used in *Ieanne d'Angleterre*, is developed until it occupies the whole of the third act. Essex and Southampton are brought before the court over which Popham presides and of which Raleigh, Cecil, and Salisbury are members. Essex, far from showing contrition, attacks his enemies,

(1658), John Banks in his *Unhappy Favorite*, and many other writers. It is probably this *History* and its descendants that M. Reynier has in mind when he speaks of the sources of Thomas Corneille's *Essex* in his *Thomas Corneille* (Paris, Hachette, 1892), p. 171.

<sup>1</sup> *A Declaration of the Practices and Treasons Attempted and Committed by Robert, late Earl of Essex, and his Complices*, 1601; cf. *Works of Francis Bacon* (Philadelphia, Carey and Hart, 1842), II, 348 ff. There may have been an intermediate source, but it was not de Thou, whose account (*op. cit.*, XIII, 574-89) omits details found both in Bacon and La Calprenède.

denies his guilt, and boasts of his achievements. Southampton makes a more substantial defense, claiming that the letter to Tyrone is a forgery and that Essex's acts of apparent rebellion are merely efforts to resist his enemies. The court remains unconvinced by this plea and Popham condemns both earls to death.

But the queen pardons Southampton and delays the execution of Essex. The latter now begs Lady Cecil to take the ring to the queen. His declared motive is love of Lady Cecil, to whom he would confide his life and honor in order to convince her that he still loves her. Quitting the prison with the ring, she hesitates between her love of Essex and her desire for revenge. In this quandary she consults her husband and with him leaves the stage. Essex now enters, surrounded by guards who lead him to execution, just as Mariane had been led out in Tristan's play. He insists upon his innocence, sending word to Lady Cecil that he regrets the useless trouble to which he has put her. The news of his execution is brought to the queen, whose grief is restrained by the thought that she has put to death a traitor. But Lady Cecil summons her to her bed-side and, now at the point of death from remorse, confesses her relations with Essex and her husband's part in her failure to deliver the ring. Elizabeth swoons, then curses Lady Cecil, mourns Essex at length, and comments on her own approaching death.

The chief struggle of the play lies in the soul of the queen. When Essex intimates that he can control her, Southampton replies (I, 5):

Le desir de regner estouffera tousiours  
Quelques ardeurs qu'elle ayt, le soin de ses amours.

It is the amplification of this couplet that forms the play. Once convinced of her favorite's guilt, she succeeds in stifling her love for him, but, hoping to find in his repentance justification for pardon, she makes every effort to induce him to send her the ring. She is a much more complex character than the earlier Elizabeth of *Ieanne d'Angleterre*. She differs from the Elizabeth of Thomas Corneille in that she is represented as an old woman,<sup>1</sup> that she has a real feeling of duty to the state, and that she is not at all jealous. The character is in keeping with the prevailing conception of Elizabeth,

<sup>1</sup> Cf. II, 5, "Qu'elle quitte l'amour, son aage l'en dispence." Voltaire, *Œuvres complètes* (Paris, Garnier, 1880), XXXII, 328, implies that Thomas Corneille's queen is also old, but the lines of his play do not make such interpretation necessary.

who constantly put the interest of England above the vagaries of her heart.

Essex is described as a haughty and unrestrained character, not unlike Rotrou's Ladislas.<sup>1</sup> His sarcasm suggests Nicomède. When brought before his judges, he arraigns them as follows:

Donc Barons souuerains, donc Iuges equitables  
 Qui pour nous occupez ces sieges redoutables, ...  
 Arbitres absolus du destin de nos testes  
 Sçauiez-vous qui ie suis, sçauiez-vous qui vous estes ?  
 Et bien qu'en vos faueurs mon destin m'ait trahy,  
 Vous souuient-il encor de m'auoir obey ?

Unfortunately the character is not represented with sufficient clarity. The evidence of his guilt is strong. His friend and he produce nothing to disprove it. Yet the fact that he never acknowledges his guilt, not even in private conversation with Southampton or Lady Cecil, must have outweighed with the audience the testimony submitted to his discredit, for d'Aubignac<sup>2</sup> praises the skill by which the spectators are brought to believe that Essex ought not to die: "Et plus on trouve de motifs pour croire qu'il ne doit point mourir, plus on a de douleur de sçavoir qu'il doit mourir." It is also not clear whether his preliminary refusal to appeal to the queen is due to fortitude or calculation. As soon as he has been sentenced, he gives the ring to Lady Cecil, saying that his love for her is the reason for his action, but as this devotion is not strong enough to save him from Lady Cecil's vengeance, it also fails to convince the reader. It remains possible to regard the hero either as the high-minded victim of political enemies or as a courtier who has sacrificed to his personal ambition his loyalty both to the queen and to his mistress. Either kind of character could be made dramatic, but the confusion of the two must, despite the critic's praise, have diminished the play's success. Thomas Corneille subsequently avoided the difficulty by generously whitewashing his hero. His Essex is not guilty of designs on the crown, is secretly married to the queen's rival, is obviously a victim.

Lady Cecil's is a dramatic rôle, but we do not see her enough to understand her actions. She still loves Essex and he has returned

<sup>1</sup> The passionate force of Rotrou's hero is attributed to the fact that *Venceslas* is based on a Spanish tragedy, but in Essex we have an earlier example of such a character on the French stage without there being any evidence of Spanish influence.

<sup>2</sup> *Pratique du théâtre* (Amsterdam, 1715), II, 125.

to her, yet she is so eager for vengeance that she yields to her husband's persuasion and allows him to be put to death. The manner in which she came to this decision needed to be explained, but, with a strange indifference to the *scène à faire*, La Calprenède put behind the scenes the interview between Cecil and his wife. The minor persons are unusually well characterized. Southampton is a friend whose devotion carries him almost to the point of threatening the queen.<sup>1</sup> Cecil and Raleigh, political enemies of Essex, are as cold and relentless as the latter is outbreaking. Popham is the high-minded judge, serenely indifferent to the passions of his associates.

One can understand why the play attracted enough attention to warrant Thomas Corneille's re-working it forty years later and Boyer's writing a play on the same subject. It is constantly dramatic, in that the fate of Essex hangs in the balance throughout almost the whole play. A queen between love and duty, a fascinating hero, a trial, the melodramatic story of the ring assured its success. I have pointed out certain shortcomings in the play. There is also unnecessary repetition. Strangely enough the two chief characters do not appear together on the stage after the first act. As time went on and Corneille's public became Racine's, the ring lost its charm, love attracted more than duty to the state, clearer exposition of character and greater respect for the proprieties were demanded. If we consider these facts, we can understand the changes that Thomas Corneille found it necessary to make. In his play the ring and the accompanying element of chance are omitted, the leading characters are changed as I have pointed out, the trial is reduced to a brief *récit*. Less interesting as an attempt to reproduce the past, Thomas Corneille's tragedy is clearer, more concentrated, in closer accord with the technique of his day. It is in this form that the play continued to be represented and read. La Calprenède's *Essex* suffered the fate of Molière's *Don Juan*, similarly re-worked by Thomas Corneille. But there has been no corresponding attempt to resuscitate this interesting play.

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[To be concluded]